

Strange Winds by L. Borealis

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Adventure, Romance

Language: English

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-12-07 02:43:08

Updated: 2018-12-07 02:43:08

Packaged: 2019-12-12 23:14:43

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 5,535

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Sometimes its the strangest things that lead you to where you belong. A Mileven/Paperman AU

Strange Winds

If you've never seen the Disney short, Paperman, go do yourself a favor and watch it on youtube before or after you read. It's basically an 8 minute animated Mileven AU that makes me cry like a baby. Enjoy!

Living in New York was nothing like Mike Wheeler had imagined. Not at all. Though, it might not have been the city's fault. It might have been his own lofty expectations.

It had been his dream to live there for as long as he could remember. From the moment he'd visited as a nine-year-old boy it had been the ultimate next chapter he'd dreamed of. A life in the sky in a city that was always building up. A world surrounded by brick and metal and constant innovation. A far cry from the quiet roads and wide empty backyards of the midwest.

Different. Exciting.

Magic.

He'd felt it there from the very beginning. It had arrested his imagination with a buzz in the air and a tug in his gut. It had always felt as though there was something there, under the surface, waiting for him like an x on a map. Some unknown destiny that he could feel deep inside of his skin.

Mike had arrived with all of that in mind in the depths of winter almost two years past. He'd been a naive starry-eyed young man with a basic degree from a basic state college. He'd taken a basic job that could hardly pay his bills, and he had done it all merely for the joy of experiencing what the city had to offer.

He knew it now: New York City wasn't like he had imagined it to be.

Every day it was the same grey buildings and the same grey skies. Even on sunny days the buildings blocked the sunlight in almost every direction, leaving him in an ever constant grey brick shadow.

He'd become accustomed to the smokestacks and the car horns and the trains that careened in a screamingly loud manner too close to his poorly located bedroom window in Queens. Life had devolved into a dull pattern of the same commute, the same bills to be paid, and the same paperwork to be filed. All of it felt dull. Monotonous. Black and white and grey.

At 25, Mike was finally starting to understand the maddening kernel of wisdom inside of his dad's constant criticism.

"Michael, why would you move to that trash heap of city? You'll just pay \$1400 a month for a hole in the wall with bad heat and stuffy air, and you'll work the same job that you could have here. It's twice the cost of living! "

Mike had had an answer, though he had kept it to himself.

"Because the city felt like magic."

Maybe his father was right, though it made Mike's skin crawl to even let the thought flit into his mind. Nonetheless, that very possibility had been gnawing away at him as the summer warmth had quickly slipped to autumn in the past few weeks. It felt as though a last sputtering hope in his heart, a dream that just maybe this city might *finally* come to life for him, was dying like a cut rose on a stem.

Mike couldn't deny it any longer. This wasn't the life he wanted at all.

Mike wanted color. He wanted excitement. He wanted to feel the wind in his hair in a way that didn't smell like the trash from the next street corner down the way. He desperately longed for the type of adventure that, he was finally starting to worry, might only live in his imagination.

And more than anything else? Mike wanted love.

That was probably the hardest part of all.

Making connections in the city was not easy at all. How could it be so hard to make a connection with someone in a city of 8 million people?!

Sure he'd tried things. Lots of things, in fact. He'd tried meetups and mixers and online dating. However, most nights (more and more as time had gone by) Mike found himself simply curled up on his too-small couch, his long legs tucked beneath a blanket with Chinese take out on his lap and whatever new superhero film had rolled around onto Netflix on his computer screen.

With each passing month, the prospect of meeting someone had become harder and harder for him to visualize. His confidence had waned, and in its place a constant set of nerves had settled in. A creeping sensation of social anxiety that had been at the edges his entire childhood had finally taken center stage, robbing him of the strength to search for the companionship he was so desperately beginning to crave.

That was how Mike found himself on that fateful Tuesday morning in October. It was a morning just like any other. Grey skies with the hint of a weather front moving in. The chill nipped at his cheeks, leaving his freckled face the tiniest bit raw as he stood quietly waiting for the train. He didn't notice it, though, for his attention had veered yet again to that sickening question that was beginning to take over his thoughts.

Was it time to call this quits?

There was one thing he knew for sure. He *hated* his job. It had been almost two full years since he had first sat at that desk, and since then it had been a maddening rotation, day in and day out, of the same papers and the same processes and the same mundane existence. He had slowly realized, a little too late, that there was no room for advancement at the firm. Maybe he had been naive, but he had expected his job to be a launching point to *something* that would truly ensconce him within the New York experience. Either promotions or connections or a social life or *something*. But instead? It was nothing more than a stuffy room of mind-bogglingly boring men, devoid of diversity and innovation. A life of black and white numbers on paper with only one way out.

Yet, his feet shuffled nervously against the concrete of the subway platform as the voice slipped into his head yet again. The one that asked if maybe he should leave the city altogether.

There was still a piece of him, albeit small, buried and covered in dust, that still believed that this place held something for him. That sensation that had cried out in his chest when he'd been young. That gut wrenching pull that his future was here. It had to have *meant* something. Maybe it was hidden. Maybe he just hadn't looked hard enough! Maybe it was stirring in the shadows, waiting just around the corner.

Yet this morning, there was only one thing stirring.

The wind.

autumn had brought along heavy gusts. They slipped between buildings with a ferocity that seemed to speed them up even faster into a whipping and tumultuous nature. Mike's never tame hair was falling victim to the wind that day, the raven black strands turning into a tiny tornado all their own. As the minutes passed and Mike waited for his train, the gusts grew more intense. In reply, his fingers began to grip harder onto the paperwork in his hands. Paperwork that he'd been forced to take home and work on the night before (for no overtime pay, he might add) in order to stay afloat at work.

Mike jumped in surprise as an errant sheet of paper blew into his arm with a slap. It splayed flat against his shoulder and crinkled in his ear. Just as quickly though, it was gone, continuing on its windy route as it flew through the air with helpless abandon.

However, it was not alone.

For, directly in its wake dashed a girl. With cascading brown hair blowing in the wind, she shot past Mike with her arm outstretched in a sudden spike of panic. Her heels tapped in quick succession against the concrete as she lunged forward and outsmarted the wind, snatching the paper from the air. She turned around as she breathed a sigh of relief, her fingers gripping the paper. She stopped short as she caught his gaze.

At that moment, something else took flight.

Mike's heart.

She was beautiful. Well, that wasn't quite the perfect way to describe her, it was so much more than that, but in that snap second Mike didn't have the capacity for words.

Her wide doe eyes had only locked with his for a second, but in that fraction of a moment Mike swore, absolutely swore, that the world lit up around her. The smattering grey backdrop of the city popped to life with yellows and blues and purples and greens. Simply because she stood before them.

She was petite, with shoulder length chestnut hair. A slight blush painted her cheeks from where the wind had kissed her. Her soft light brown eyes seemed both kind and a little nervous as she looked at him and, before Mike could register that he was likely staring at her like a mad man, she graced him with the sweetest smile upon her red stained lips.

Then, before Mike could even blink, she looked away. She faced forward just as anyone would do while they waited for the train on a Tuesday morning commute.

Mike, however, did not return to that lackluster everyday daze. When he looked away he felt dizzy. Something inside of his chest had exploded into a flurry that felt too overwhelming for him to comprehend. He stayed that way... eyes straight forward trying to gain the capacity to take a breath... until another quick gust of wind smacked straight against him.

He wasn't quick enough. His fingers fumbled and failed to grasp a work paper that had become ensnared by the wind. It slipped from his folder and flung fast into the air.

Mike flung around, ready to run after it, but it stopped in an instant. In the most embarrassing place in the whole world.

Smack against the beautiful girl's face.

Mike gaped in horror, his blood running instantly cold, as her face became obscured behind the assaulting piece of paper. Feeling more awkward than he ever had in his life, Mike reached forward and peeled the paper off of her.

When he revealed her again, her eyes were closed and her nose was scrunched in the most painfully adorable expression of discomfort. He opened his mouth, stumbling to come up with an apology, before her eyes slipped back open and met his once again.

Apologies mingled and died on his tongue as he froze.

He was closer to her now. He could see the flecks of gold in her eyes, ringed with a light shadow that shimmered even in the dull grey daylight. And he noticed, much to his surprise, that she didn't look away. Instead, she smiled.

At him.

Mike melted, his fingers going limp against the paper as his eyes refused to look away from the radiancy of... of her. His brain begged him to talk, to say anything, anything at all, yet his tongue seemed unwilling to cooperate.

She had the most playful smile. There was a quirk at the edges of her lips, her head ducked slightly as she looked up at him, her eyes sliding from him to the paper in his hand.

And then, she laughed.

God, it sounded like bells. The whole train station, the whole city, his whole life faded away from him at the presence of her laugh, her expression embarrassed, her cheeks turning more red.

Confused and overwhelmed and not knowing how to process any of it at all, Mike followed her eye line and his heart leapt once again. Featured in the center of his mundane and meaningless sheet of paper was her perfect puckered kiss. Her vibrant red lipstick had smeared across the paper.

Mike couldn't help but laugh himself.

It was a delightfully innocent result of the chaos of the city. A spinning confluence of events that had spilled together between the wind and the subway schedules and the random roads and streets and jobs and circumstances that brought him, and her, to this moment. And now he held its result, this beautiful woman's kiss,

right in his hand.

And that's when his heart finally spoke.

It sparked in an instant.

Magic.

Maybe this was it. Maybe this was the moment. Maybe this was...

Mike looked up, his whole body jumping as his tongue finally found its courage.

Yet she was gone.

Mike gasped and watched in shock as the stranger moved deep into the train car. The doors slipped shut as she disappeared, her skirt him trailing against the backs of her knees as she moved. The train pulled away in what felt like an instant, the moment robbed from him before he'd even known to seize it.

And then suddenly, just as his cynicism had tried to take hold to tell him that the moment had just been a fluke and didn't matter at all, he looked to the window, and caught her eyes once again. It only lasted a second, but she was looking at him directly, as though she had sought him out. She didn't look away as she contemplated him with a shy and forlorn smile.

And then she instantly disappeared. .

Mike felt his entire body crash with the loss of her warmth. Something so seemingly meaningless, yet he knew, so truly meaningful, had slipped through his grasp.

And to make matters worse?

He had just missed his train.

OoO

She had rattled him to the depths. He couldn't deny it.

Mike's eyes were foggy and his shoulders sagged as he sat at his desk later that morning. He'd been twenty minutes late to work, a mistake that had obviously not been overlooked by his sad excuse for a boss, Mr. Thompson.

A single paper now sat on his desk, and frankly it was all that he could think about. Call him creepy, he almost wondered if he was being so himself, but as he'd turned in his paperwork he'd asked for a fresh empty copy of that single document. He had re-filled each line with the information and turned that one in instead. The one in front of him, the one that was sealed with her perfect red kiss, was now his own.

At least he had that to remember her by.

Not like he needed it.

Mike rolled his eyes at himself, his own desperation almost too much for him to handle as he realized, with sad clarity, that the most exciting moment of his life in the last few months had been a silent twenty second interaction with a strange woman that he would, surely, never see again. He didn't know her name. He didn't know what her voice sounded like. He knew absolutely nothing about her at all...

...but for how she had made him feel.

Yet, that wasn't enough and it clearly didn't mean anything. Because here he was, back at his terrible job, with his terrible boss, and his boring as hell coworkers, breathing the same stale air and staring at the same eye blistering papers, once again.

At least today there was a breeze through the window beside him.

The slap of the stack of papers in front of his face caught his attention. Mike looked up, unable to hide his displeasure from his expression, as Mr. Thompson sneered. One look said nothing and everything at the exact same time. Mike knew it. He could see it in the man's ice-laced eyes, just as he'd heard it in his voice when he'd been twenty minutes late two hours earlier.

He was on thin ice.

Mike rolled his eyes at the man's back as he turned away and returned to his office. The stack of papers in front of him taunted him like a bad joke. Suddenly, like the whole Earth was in on it too, a gust of wind swept up from nowhere and tried with glee to steal the one thing that had brought him any joy throughout the entire day.

Mike leapt in desperation as the paper containing the beautiful girl's lipstick was tugged into the air and pulled toward the window. He lunged and, with just the tips of his fingers, succeeded in pinning the paper against the window sill just inches before it had escaped from the 19th floor and out into the wide world below. Fingers shaking, Mike slipped the paper back inside the sill and breathed a sigh of relief, his eyes wavering vaguely out of the window as he stood back up.

That was when he saw her.

Mike gasped and lunged against the glass, his heart jumping to his throat.

In perfect view through a window across the street, she appeared. Mike watched with rapturous attention as she shook a man's hand and walked over to a seat. She slimmed her brown skirt against the back of her thighs and sat in a chair at the opposite end of a desk, her folder held tightly to her chest. Her back was straight and at attention, her blue blouse falling perfectly against her frame, as she focused forward toward an unseen person, clearly ready for a meeting.

Mike couldn't believe his eyes. Surely, he had gone mad, right? There was no way that in this city of eight million strangers the only person he'd met in months who he'd felt drawn to had appeared for the second time in a single morning. Yet, as he squinted and forced his eyes to focus on every single detail of her, he was sure.

It was her.

Mike looked around in a flurry, his heart hammering at his chest, his fingers fidgeting in the air as he tried to grasp onto what the hell he

was going to do.

Because he *had* to do something.

Oh! It was easy!

Instantly forgetting the world around him, Mike threw open the window and leaned out as far as he safely could. He waved his long arms in a crazed and excited fashion. It had to be obvious to her, if she would just look his way!

Yet... she didn't...

Before he could be impulsive enough to call out to her, he heard a throat clear menacingly from behind him. Mike grimaced and turned to find Mr. Thompson leaning infuriatingly far back in his chair, giving Mike 'the look'.

Mike sighed in annoyance as he glanced at her again. And then like the crack of a whip, his brain took flight. Determination set in. It was crazy. He *felt* crazy. Dazed and drunk and totally out of his element as he thought fast for a plan. He was good at laying plans. Good at hatching haphazard schemes. He could do this!

He looked around the desk in front of him. The only available weapon?

Paper.

With a lightning bolt of confidence, the days of youth returned to his fingers. Guided by sense memory, Mike snatched a piece of paper and created a simple and agile paper airplane. He checked the angles, knowing full well that the quality of the flight was dependent upon the quality of the design. When he was satisfied, he stood up from his chair and faced the window, conviction in his stance. With his focus squarely placed on the beautiful woman through the window across the street, he threw.

The first attempt was an abject failure, spiraling down to the street below.

But never fear, Mike could try again. His paper airplane throwing

arm was just a little bit rusty, after all! It *had* been about ten years.

Mike turned back to his desk, folded yet another piece, and set his aim once more time. His breath caught fast in his throat as the plane shot in a straight line directly across the expanse... a perfect throw... only to miss the mark by two feet. It crunched and dropped against the stone right outside of her window.

No matter, because there was no stopping him now.

He did not stop when he was held back by Mr. Thompson, his meaty hand on Mike's shoulder as he forcefully shut the window and stalked away, disappearing behind his closed office door. He did not stop when a paper plane entered the window below hers, delivering itself instead to a portly man who seemed so excited to see the missive that Mike almost felt bad as he waved his arms to signal that it wasn't for him. He did not stop when the *absolute perfect throw* was thwarted by a pigeon who decimated it only a few feet from slipping into her window, though that one, admittedly, had stung a bit. He did not stop at all. He tried again and again and again. Near misses and far misses and successful attempts occurred. One went so far as to fly straight behind her *into* the room, but she simply did not see.

With each passing attempt, Mike felt the stakes grow. For, with every single attempt, his eyes had narrowed upon her and he had fallen in love with something new. The exact sweep of her collarbone. The angle of her hair as it swept behind her ear. The delicate arch of her fingers as she drew circles on a paper in her hand. The precious way she tucked her ankles together as she leaned forward and listened to the person that he could not see.

He did not know why, he did not know how, but somehow... beyond rational comprehension Mike knew that this mattered.

Moreso, Mike knew that *she* mattered.

His heart cried harder with each and every failed attempt, his desperation and probable insanity growing by the minute. Yet he did not stop. And he did not stop. And he did not stop.

Until the paper stopped... and his paper tray clattered, empty, onto

the floor beside his desk.

Reality rushed over Mike like a splash of cold water as the assaulting sound hit his ears. It was only then that he looked around his office for the very first time. The entire room that existed behind him the entire time, but he had simply, and oddly, forgotten. They, however? The whole room of his coworkers? They had *definitely* not forgotten that *he* existed. A whole host of wary eyes were trained on him as though he was a mad man who had interrupted their day.

Which... maybe he was...

Yet, as he spun around and saw her again through the window across the street, the spell she spun ensnared him once again. And the room full of coworkers? Just like magic, they faded instantly from his mind.

But the moment was, as he could see, coming to a close. Mike watched almost petrified, his heart beating helplessly, so close, yet so far away, as she stood from her chair and made to leave the room.

Mike swallowed hard against a rising lump in his throat.

It's not like he was stupid. He knew that love at first sight might not go both ways. However, something within him pleaded that he try one last time. Just for the chance that she could see him... so that she could make the choice for herself.

Her choice. Not fate's.

Mike's hair rustled against a fresh gust of wind, and a final piece of paper did as well. He caught it with a flat hand on his desk, his fingers slayed around the perfect pucker of her lips that she had left like a tattoo on the paper... Without a second thought, Mike moved quickly as, one last time, he folded an airplane. Her kiss was now a missive in his hand, an attempted return.

Mike stood at the windowsill; poised for a final throw.

He took a deep breath...

... and the wind blew yet again, stealing the paper like a thief from

his grasp.

Mike gasped in horror, his hands scrambling out the window as her beautiful lips slipped in a spiral from his fingers and fell to the dirty street below. He looked up helplessly and watched her disappear from the room.

It was the sound of his boss's office door that brought back any of Mike's attention at all.

He looked up like a stunned animal as his boss approached his desk. Mr. Thompson said nothing. A cigarette hung languidly from his lip and a stack of papers higher than his chest was poised in his hands. Without ceremony, he dropped them onto Mike's desk.

Mike dropped to his seat with the same heaviness as the stack of paper. It all fell on him then, all of it, with a clarity he'd been seeking for months. The heaviness of it all. The lost dreams and the heavy realities. The suffocating walls and angry streets. The air that filled his lungs and made him feel heavier, slower, and more beat down with each passing day. The moments, almost every single one of them, dry and arid and completely devoid of magic...

...Except for her...

She had possessed the first color he'd seen in months. She had lit up his heart in an instant with nothing more than a glance, something that a whole entire city had not been able to do.

Maybe it wasn't the magic of the city he'd been seeking.

Maybe it was her.

Mike was on his feet before he'd even finished the thought. With a last glance out the window he saw her, like a beacon, appear on the street below. Leaving his entire life behind, Mike's legs carried him like air out of the office door, down the stairs, and to the street. He came to a stumbling halt at the sidewalk and scanned the expanse. Yet, he could not see her there at all. Mike rushed across traffic, not thinking or caring about the risk as he searched the street full of strange faces for the serenity of hers.

She was nowhere to be found.

Stopping on the other side of the street Mike spun in a desperate circle, his hands pulling at his hair, crazed and lost and out of breath, until his eyes fell onto something that crashed like a hurricane against his heart.

Her lipstick, on a paper plane, stuck atop a mailbox.

At the sight, the world spun around him in a sickening tizzy and the implications settled in like a cold vice around his heart. The craziness of it all. The shocking sense of loss. All for a person he had never gotten to know.

It was then that Mike snapped. A final straw of days, months, and years.

The city had beat him. Once and for all.

Snatching the paper with a ferocious spike of anger, Mike threw it hard and instantly stalked away. And that was precisely the moment when, just like his exasperation, the wind became a swirl. Mike groaned in abject frustration as the wind beat against his face, growing colder, just like his heart.

He gave no thought of returning upstairs to his job. He'd stalked out, after all.

Frankly? He was done.

He was done with that job, and this city, and all of these god forsaken streets. He was done with this place that had showed him nothing but disappointment no matter how hard he had tried to find joy within its noise. He was done with boyhood fantasy. He was a man now. Cynical and cold and devoid of dreams.

He was done.

He was moving home. Screw the shame of cowing to his dad. Maybe it was worth it. Tail between his legs, he would go back to Indianapolis where Dustin was a teacher, Lucas practiced law and Will spent his days was painting away. Maybe he could live with

Will, who had made the smart decision and rented a small apartment on the edge of town where he could afford to live on commissions of his artwork.

It was time to go back to the land of clear decisions and a straightforward easy path.

The grey of the streets seemed to echo his heartbreak as he stormed down the sidewalk. Wind swirled around him, slowing his gait as though it was trying to let him know that it wasn't done with him yet. And, in a taunting return, a familiar piece of paper with the red stain attached to his leg. Mike gave it no second thought. It was a nuance at this point. Proof of his own naivete. A cruel joke that the city was playing on him.

He threw it away without care.

But it didn't go away...

The wind blew again and it returned.

And now? It had friends.

Confusion sweeping over him, Mike batted at the growing number of papers, but oddly, it was no use, and the next time when the wind gusted Mike was hit with a *throng* of his god forsaken planes.

How could this be happening?!

Was it the wind? Or something more?

Mike gasped, his eyes wide with shock as the tips of the plane's noses began to push on his chest with a force so strong that he, against his own control, stumbled backwards down the street from the direction from whence he had come.

This was it. He was losing it. He was losing his mind.

All the while, the throng of planes grew thicker. It was as though a million of his dreams had been released from his body and had taken flight against him, spinning him backward, spinning him through the streets of the city, pushing against him with a force that he could not

understand at all. His body gave into the spinning flight of fancy, flinging him across traffic and down the sidewalk, covering him in an ever thickening paper flurry that left him terrified and stunned and helpless all at once.

Yet, finally... he stopped. Paper covering him like a dreamlike suit, he watched with wide eyed shock as the red of her lips flew from the mass and whisked away on the wind.

He had to be dreaming. This had to be a dream.

But it didn't quit, and the obscene and truly fantastical affair took over his body once again.

He was shuttled with stumbling legs and swinging arms up a flight of train stairs, through the turnstile, and was all but beat into submission through the doors of a train.

"*Sit down!*" the papers seemed to scream in silent command as they forced him into a seat, little pinpricks of weight stronger than he could ever imagine.

Finally, the train stopped and like an incantation, Mike felt himself rise, fear cresting over him as his feet shuttled from the train and onto his very own platform back home in Queens.

Yet it was not home that he saw.

For at that moment, pinned to his spot beyond his control, Mike watched as the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, the girl he had spent every second thinking about since he'd laid eyes on her that morning, exited from the train across the platform.

She looked up toward the sky with a thrilling sense of awe... A single lipstick stained paper plane tucked within her fingers.

Mike's could not believe his eyes.

He did not even notice as the manifestation of a million dreams fell away from his body like so many sheets of paper scattering back into the wind.

She turned. Her eyes locked on Mike's in a way that stole his breath. She smiled at him softly, almost as though she knew him. Almost as though she was happy to see him, too.

That's when Mike regained his control, his legs yet again moving of their own accord.

Heart in throat, feet on the ground, head in the clouds, Mike stepped instinctually toward her.

She closed the gap between them, her eyes mirroring the sense of shock and awe coursing through his veins.

It was almost as though they had been planning to meet at this exact spot all along.

Which, as Mike looked at her, and the entirety of his life flashed before his eyes, he realized... they had.

"Hi," he said, his voice trembling. "I'm Mike."

Her red lips curled into a shy smile. Her eyes sparkled with a depth he couldn't measure.

She simply said... "El."

Thanks for taking a read! I'd love to hear from you below, and if you need more Mileven it have a host of it available in my profile :) - L -